

A TIME TO FROWN AND A TIME TO SMILE

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The following is by William Arnot, *Studies in Proverbs*:

"The north wind driveth away rain: so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue." Proverbs 25:23

There is a use for everything. There is a use for the north wind, and for an angry countenance. Rough visaged, ungainly messengers both are; but when sent on necessary errands, they fulfil their mission well. When David wanted a weapon, Ahimelech, the peaceful priest of Nob, having no other than the sword of Goliath, which he kept as a relic, apologized as he offered it, thinking it not sufficiently slim and fashionable for a soldier from the court. "There is none like that," said David; "give it me." The man of war had seen hard service, and expected more: The sword that could deal a heavy blow was the sword for him.

According to the translation in the text, it appears that in the climate of Palestine the north wind carries the rain clouds away, and prevents them from discharging their burden on the land. The same phenomenon is to some extent observed in our own island [Britain]. This meteoric fact is framed into a proverb, and employed to describe an analogous feature in the action of moral forces in human life: "An angry countenance driveth away a backbiting tongue."

There is a place for anger as well as for love. As in nature a gloomy tempest serves some beneficial purposes for which calm sunshine has no faculty; so in morals a frown on an honest man's brow is, in its own place, as needful and useful as the sweetest smile that kindness ever kindles on a human countenance. A gentle, loving character is much admired, and, where it is genuine, deserves all the admiration it has ever gotten yet. These features, however, constitute only one side of a man, and we must see the other side ere we can pronounce an intelligent judgment on his worth. If he has not another side, he will not leave his mark on the world.

If he has not the faculty of frowning, I would not give much for his smile. A worthy matron once showed me her own portrait set in a massive frame, and suspended in the most conspicuous place of her best room. Her sons had secured the services of an eminent artist to fix their mother's features on the canvas that filial piety, in a future day, might have the double aid of sense and memory in the effort to recall the past. The old lady, after asking her visitor's opinion, frankly pronounced her own: "It is not in the least like me; I never had such great black blotches in the middle of my face." The artist's shade offended her. A shining disc of red and white would have pleased her better. She excelled more in the management of family economics than in judging a work of art. Such, in a more important sphere, is the taste that demands only gentleness in human character, and would dispense with virtues of swarthier hue.

We don't want a fretful, passionate man; and if we did, we would find one without searching long or going far. We want neither a man of wrath, nor a man of indiscriminating, unvarying softness. We want something with two sides; that is, a solid, real character. Let us have a man who loves good and hates evil, and who in place and time convenient, can make either emotion manifest in his countenance. The frown of anger is the shade that lies under love and brings out its beauty. The wisdom that is from above, whether as doctrinally revealed in the Bible or practically operating in a Christian life, "is first pure and then peaceable."

Salt is worthless when it has lost its saltiness. The double command of the Lord, corresponding to the two constituent elements of a disciple's character is, "Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another" (Mark 9:50). The gentleness which will have peace on any terms, is neither pleasing to the Lord nor beneficial to men; if there is no pungency there will be no purifying.

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